

THE STONE



When you were born a tall handsome woman with the slenderest of fingers gave you back your stone. She placed it on your tongue like an aspirin and held your mouth shut and stroked your throat until you had to swallow. The stone is smooth, shaped and pressed by the weight of all the world's waters, rolled by the journeys of all the world's rivers to the sea. Inside you it becomes a perfect sphere the size of a pea. A thin layer of cells coats it so that you can carry it all your life like a shark carries souvenirs from all its meals.

When you are ready to die the woman will come again. She will still be handsome and her fingers will still be sharp. With incredible ease, and drawing very little blood, she will reach through your side and pluck out the stone, now big as a cherry. It has absorbed all your days and nights which give it the color of pale blood. It is your stone, but she will keep it for you. When she swallows the stone your heart will burst. When you are ready to try again, she will come to you. She will put the stone on your tongue and hold your mouth and stroke and stroke your throat. It will be harder to swallow. You will always wish for a smaller stone.

Joe Survant, Kentucky Poet Laureate 2003 - 2004

First printed in "The Presence of Snow in the Tropics".

Reprinted with permission; author retains all rights.



This Poem-a-Day is provided by the Kentucky Arts Council in celebration of Kentucky Writers' Day and the literary arts in Kentucky.



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS

A great nation
deserves great art.